Depot Town Rag

Volume 14, Number 11 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

100% FREE Rag content

November 1991

- Virginia remembers
- **5-Year Plan reviewed**
- *"Not a shanty!"*
- **Fictional setting**

and other strictly local stuff. . . .

Not really retiring, Ike says he'll still be around . . .

Ike's sold the shop, but Sharon will keep the old name

Sharon Ann Montroy has bought Ike's Depot Barbershop fromOscar "Ike" Rednour and plans to keep the tonsorial enterprise going just like it has been for the last eighty-two years. "I never thought I'd be doing this kind of business," says Sharon, who has spent the past thirteen years barbering in the Downriver area and Taylor.

Sharon will be assisted by an able crew of women barbers: Ike's daughter, Judy Anderson, still helps out at the shop and Theresa Polski has been a regular back-up barber these past few months.

Ike reminisces about his many years in Depot Town: "I bought the place from Roy Nelson, who had been here for five years. Before that, Morgan Devee was barbering here for forty-five years!"

The square mirrors set on the diagonal are original features in the shop and Ike remembers the pot-bellied stove that used to heat the place.

February 9 marked Ike's thirty-second year in the business at this location and everyone is asking how he'll spend his time after retirement. "He'll certainly have more time for talking," says Sharon, who noted the constant chatter that always goes on at this friendly and comfortable barbershop. Ike says he'll now have time for more fishing and he and Bessie will travel, too.

Still, no one in the area can imagine this venerable business known by any other name and Sharon says she plans to keep it. "It'll always be 'Ike's Depot Barbershop'," says Sharon.

Ypsilanti here we come, right back where we started from

Pun-filled, public promos proliferate

Alliterative urban promotional slogans filled the FM airwaves last month with subtle slogans touting Seasonal Southfield, Wonderful Wyandotte, and Fashionable Ferndale. This month we might look forward to Winsome Wayne, Darling Dearborn, Gorgeous Garden City, Tremendous Troy, Awesome Ann Arbor and maybe even Downtrodden Detroit. Perhaps Depot Town has been too low key with its casual and homely references to things "Down in Depot Town."

Maybe that's because almost everybody in town can remember early designations which began with *decrepit, declining, decadent, defamed, desperate,* and *depressing* in contrast to today's *decorous, determined, diligent, distinguished, dominant* and *dynamic* Depot Town (whew!).

But, while we have the D-pages of Webster's open, notice *dimeric* . . . and think of the other side of the Huron River for a while. (Dimeric = composed of two parts or divisions. Dimeric Ypsilanti? Wasn't he a Greek general or something? Y, oh Y didn't he keep on going to Wyoming?)

Rather than a litany of East/Westisms, why not yearn for Ypsilanti's youthful days of yesteryear? Yep, yeasty Y-literation from yonder dictionary urges the yearning yahoo to don yarmulke and cry "Yippie! I've created a Yuppie slogan for Yester-lanti!" (yawn.) "I'm a Yuppie Yahoo Yippe from Ypsilanti City!"

We think our creative readers can do better than that. Next month let's have "Bigger and Better Slogans Month." Send your phrases -- alliterative or not -- to the *Rag* Editor, 25 1/2 East Cross Street. Regular readers agree: we'll publish almost anything.

RR Tower returns after 100-year absence . . . page 5

Yes, Virginia, there's still a Depot Town!

Virginia Adamick's uncle, Carl Clow, driving the American Express wagon up River Street from the depot. The railroad water tank is in the background.

Virginia Thomas Adamick remembers the old neighborhood -- and she sat down with the Saturday monrning crowd in the Farmers' Market coffeeshop last month to reminisce about her childhood days on the block.

Virginia was born to Frederick and Ruth Thomas and spent her childhood at 716 North River Street. Over the years she has lived on Water, Grove and Dwight streets. Her grandparents were Ira Clow and Dena Schrepper.

Today, Virginia resides at Clark Towers, but she remembers her uncle Carl Clow, when he used to drive the American Express wagon with deliveries from the depot. Mr. Morrow was the express agent in those days, and she remembers that the depot gardens were at their height of glory then. She has pictures of those gardens -- they're on loan to some local history buffs right now -- and she hopes to run them in an upcoming issue of *The Rag* when they're returned.

Virginia lived in the apartment above the Old Town Restaurant in 1925 and remembers her grandmother staying up all night with the crystal radio listening for the news that Charles Lindberg had landed in France.

Like many old friends of Depot Town, Virginia is an excellent story teller and remembers there were several train wrecks at the depot: "One in 1928 or -9 took down the building next to today's Sidetrack," she says, "and it was the 1939 wreck that did most of the damage to the depot and tower."

Regular *Rag* readers will look forward to Virginia's long-range plan to create a district business directory from memories of her childhood. That's the kind of history local folks really like to hear. In some locales, people just *study* history; but down in Depot Town, they help *make* it.

D.T.A. President's message:

Can we talk? Sure, we can be proud of our accomplishments as an association and business district. But are we satisfied? Are we willing to accept what we are today as what we will be tomorrow? And what does tomorrow offer us as a business district? Can we reach our short term goal of increasing our foot traffic by 100%?

These are questions that I believe must be answered this year. It has been said that Timing and Keeping Your Eye on the Ball are the essence of business success. Because without a ball (plan), keeping your eye on it (goals), and timing (knowing when to bring your plan into play), you end up REACTING instead of ACTING. The difference is winning or losing. Make it happen or watch opportunities disappear.

It is my firm belief that we have come too far not to go forward. As a business district we have many advantages that other business districts in the county don't have. First of all we have Location; secondly we have Location; and last, but not least, we have Location. This may sound too simple, but if we have location — in order to build a strong, healthy business climate in Depot Town — all we need is a product and a market strategy that works.

This product can not be any ordinary item that you would purchase in a strip mall or larger places such as Briarwood Mall. It should be unique with a target market that extends past Washtenaw County. An example would be Quilts. Suppose Depot Town redeveloped this 19th Century cottage industry and on a regular basis there was a show in the Freighthouse for nationally known artists to show off their wares. Would that help us to reach our short term goal of increasing the foot traffic by 100%? I believe it would.

The market strategy could be as simple as cooperatively advertising Depot Town as a unique commercial district: within two blocks, a shopper can experience the Victorian buildings, Huron River, Riverside Park, Frog Island, the Freighthouse, the railroad tracks, and the unique specialty shops of Depot Town.

I would suggest that we are loaded with natural advantages as a business district but we have, for some reason or other, been hung-up on a business plateau. The inevitable outcome will be either we start declining slowly or we make necessary changes that will move us forward. Even though it may be one of the most apprehensive words in the English language, you can ;not *change* without making *changes*. Going forward is a win situation for the business owners, property owners, our members, nearby business districts, City of Ypsilanti and the people which it serves. If Depot Town's business district prospers, everyone in the community benefits.

The first step to move forward should begin with a review of our Depot Town Association's organizational structure to see if it can be improved. We need a structure that adequately reflects the reality of our strengths and weaknesses. the organizational vehicle to take us to our next 'business level' should be a simple, uncomplicated structure predicated on our limited resources, people and dollars.

Your association has begun the process with a proposed change in our Bylaws. In the past, we have had a Vice President office whose only job description was to preside in the absence of the President. The proposed change in our Bylaws would change the title to President-Elect whose job description would include presiding in the absence of the President, willing to be the next President, and gaining an understanding of the financial reports by working closely with the Treasurer.

Clearly, *change* is the next step to improve the business climate in Depot Town. We should immediately put into play our *Five Year Business Plan* and establish realistic short term goals for us to accomplish our *Long Term Goal* of being the *Unique Business District* in Washtenaw County. This will require us to be focused on our objectives. These goals should be decided by our membership at the next meeting. If you have ideas, now is the time to make them known.

Talk is cheap. It is time for *change*. Let's get on with our Five Year Business Plan.

-Bill French, your Prez

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Depot Town Five-Year Business Plan

Depot Town Commercial District : A National Historic District with an appreciation of our past with a 'business eye' to the future.

PURPOSE: To develop Depot Town as the *unique business district inWashtenaw County.*

OBJECTIVE: *To Increase Foot Traffic by 100%*

STRATEGY: *Aggressively market Depot Town as a Unique Commercial District;* within two blocks a shopper can experience the Victorian buildings, the Huron River, Riverside Park, Frog Island Park, the historic Freighthouse, the Railroad Tracks, and the Specialty Shops of Depot Town.

EXECUTIVE ANALYSIS: The Depot Town Five Year Business Plan is an ambitious effort by the Merchants, Property Owners, and the Depot Town Association that can be achieved on schedule — with the cooperation of the Public and Private Sectors.

The stated purpose of becoming "the unique business district in Washtenaw County" can be a reality because of the size of the business district. A few well planned changes can have great impact upon the area.

These changes should include, but not be limited to:

1. A Merchant/Property Owner Relationship that is based upon cooperation and mutual respect for each other's interest in our stated Objective.
2. Improvement of the merchant storefront facades.
3. The implementation of a 'planned commercial mix.'
4. Constant re-evaluation of the 'product' by the merchants.
5. Commitment by the City of Ypsilanti to our plan.
6. Develop a 'maintenance program' to keep our district clean and attractive to the shopper.
7. Develop an aggressive marketing plan.
8. Develop an effective fund raiser.
9. Management that encourages participation by all and that recognizes new leadership talent in the district. Assign individuals, not committees, to the Project. The Individual establishes the cost of the project, budget (where the monies will come from), and a completion schedule.
10. Depot Town Association should be the 'ship,' with the Merchants on one 'oar' and the Property Owners on the other 'oar.' The speed and direction will be decided by the majority.
11. The Master Plan for Depot Town should include the business plan and the master plan for the Freighthouse.

CONVENTION/TOURISM: See NIFTY (New Initiative For Tourism in Ypsilanti) and the Ypsilanti Visitors & Convention Bureau.

MERCHANDISING MIX: The Merchants should take the leadership role. Developing data necessary to 'see' where we are and where we want to go.

LEASING: The Property Owner should develop a package of financial methods and lease terms/ conditions that will accomplish our stated Purpose.

MARKETING: Merchants and Property Owners

OPERATIONS: Depot Town Association

PROPERTY DIRECTION: Merchants and Property Owners

PLANNING CALENDAR: Depot Town Association

MARKETING BUDGET: Merchants

MARKETING RESEARCH: Merchants

ATTRACTING NEW MERCHANTS: Merchant, Property Owners, Depot Town Association. Sales Brochures/Videos

ACTION PLANS:

Improvement of Storefronts
Providing the Product
Maintenance Program
Promotion
Signal Tower
Activity Calendar
Attracting Desired Businesses
Public Participation
Marketing
Fund Raiser
Street Lighting
Bulletin Board

Advertising/sponsorship opportunity outside Depot Town environs:

Place your business's copy in
The Depot Town Rag
for only $10 a month and you'll get:

•

Your business name and specials placed before the most loyal clientele in Washtenaw County

•

A classy sticker to place on your door to let your clientele know that you're an active supporter of Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town

•

1500 promotions a month through our regular readers

•

A loyal readership of cult followers who are intersted in the same kind of corny, home town stuff that you are

•

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•

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•

The opportunity to make monthly changes in your ad copy

•

10% off the cost if you pay for 1992 in one payment

•

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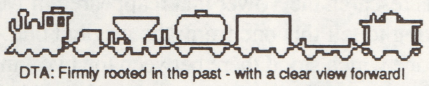
Depot Town Association, Inc., 17 October 1991



DTA: Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward!

Guests: Nancy and Bob Sears, of the Ypsi Area Street Rods Association.

Minutes of September were approved with one correction: It's not Pam Hinds, but Tammy Himes, who so ably represented the City Recreation Department at the last meeting. Sorry, Tam.

Treasury: $4800 in the general fund. Line items will be worked out for the November meeting. Refunds for French and Hansen overpayments are imminent.

Vice President introduced Nancy and Bob Sears regarding the **May 2 Kick-off for the giant street rod show**. Negotiations continue with the City for locationg the whole show here.

The car club's next meeting is 10 November at the Golden Boy in Belleville.

President French made the following **appointments of standing committees:**

- Membership - Bonni Rosen-Fine
- Events - Carolyn McKeever
- Freighthouse - Margaret Harner
- Heritage Festival - Steve Gross
- Rag Sales - Bill French

Anyone else wishing to serve? Please contact Bill at Aubree's any day of the week. There's always room for more involvement.

2nd reading for Bylaws change: Sandee French moved, Judy Monaghan seconded, that the name "Vice President" be changed to "President Elect." Passed.

Winter Blues Concert operating budget for the 3rd Saturday in February and March was presented by Carolyn McKeever. The plan will be co-sponsored by the City of Ypsilanti. Accepted.

Amy MacMillan indicated that a proposal will be forthcoming regarding joint sponsorship of a series of **Summer Brown Bag Concerts in the Park.**

Paul Fetters reported on **DDA expenditures** so far.

Tom Dodd announced that the long awaited **Crossing Tower** will be assembled and erected this weekend, but doesn't plan to notify the photographers from the dailies until he can see it. The plan began in 1981. See this issue for the flap over what to call the thing.

Rag Report: 18 sponsors continue into August. The publication is in need of the organizational talents of a business manager. Apply in person.

Police Report: Vice President, Dave Blackmer, has met again with the police department. He (Miller's Ice Cream Parlor) will continue to be the district's police liaison through whom business managers and residents may funnel their concersn; and if clients will not file complaints against panhandlers, merchants may follow-up and do so. This has been very effective in the recent past and gives the street people the necessary protection and help, as well.

Freighthouse Committee is aiding with the Street Rods show; an estate auction is being scheduled for November, says Margaret Harner's committee.

The Hallowe'en Hoopla for kids is ready for November 30 and volunteers may contact Amy MacMillan at City Hall to help out.

Victorian Holiday plans? No report, although the VCB and CBC have reported our willingness to do a joint promotion.

Line items are needed in the operating budget, especially for the upcoming jazz promotions. Carolyn McKeever will incubate and propose at the November meeting.

June's Frog Island Festival planning is under way and Ark officials wish to meet with DTA regarding the printed program in December.

100 Frog Island (frog) pins have been turned over to DTA and have sold for $5 each. That's a $500 profit . . . when we sell them.

Ideas for up the road a ways: A quilt show with commemorative jigsaw puzzles of the winners. An outdoor sculpture competition at Heritage Festival with toy models of the winners as a fundraiser.

Bylaws were amended with the passage of the 2nd reading of the following clause:

Indemnification. Each person who is or was a director or an officer of this corporation shall be indemnified by the corporation to the fullest extent permitted by the corporation laws of the State of Michigan, as they may be in effect from time to time; provided, however, the corporation shall have no obligation to indemnify any director or officer in connection with any proceeding, or part thereof, initiated by such director or officer without authorization of the Board of Directors. This corporation may purchase any insurance on behalf of any such person in any such capacity or arising out of his or her status as such, whether or not the corporation would have power to indemnify such person against such liability under the laws of the State of Michigan.

President French appointed Sandee French to head a committee to suggest **fundraising techniques** for next month. Sandee still favors a 'cow flop' concept and it will surely top her list of suggestions if no one helps her out.

Ypsilanti Recycling Project has purchased a new truck and is building a new garage at the facility, reported YRP president, Gary McKeever.

November 1991

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Depot Town Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 11/21
The Old Caboose

Depot Town
Antique Engine Club 11/28
7:00 p.m. Thursday,
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

1991-1992 officers

President	A. William French	- 483-1870
Vice president	Dave Blackmer	- 485-7546
Secretary/editor	Tom Dodd	- 482-6371
Treasurer	Bettie Dodd	- 482-6371

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THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
A. William French, president
c/o The Old Caboose
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Edifice Complex:

Local History that Never Happened

Lowland Cemetery:

Much like its counterpart to the north, this graveyard was moved several times over the years. Most of the first moves were due to natural causes but, once the rainy season was over, funerals were again held - wherever the cemetery happened to be that month.

Although not in use today, Lowland Cemetery is now suspected to be somewhere between the Huron Golf Course and Cliffs On The Point - somewhere in the middle of Ford Lake's North Bay.

District's favorite tower back in place

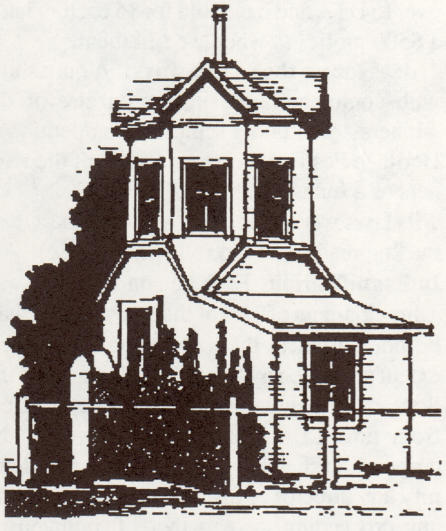
When future historians research the Tower that reappeared in Depot Town this month, they'll have a difficult time trying to tell this one from the original one -- and then figuring out what happened to the square one which stood there between the two - in time - for at least fifty years. But, even more difficult will be trying to document how local citizens built an 1890's Tower in the 1990's in the first place. How does anyone get away with erecting a structure (that can't legally be called a building), with somebody else's money (well, it *was* DDA/City money, so that's *our* tax money being spent right in our own neighborhood), and on somebody else's property (the railroad and the depot owners had to give official permission and waivers for the use of the land)!

Recognizing all those official bodies is nothing compared to the recognition deserved by the many who helped promote, design, build and paint the edifice. James Waite, preservation architect for Colonial Williamsburg, provided the first working drawings; Fingerle-Hollister-Wood's Tim Heiss drew updated plans for several versions; DTA president Bill French provided the leadership in getting the project rolling after a ten-year hiatus; Midwest Consulting's Danny Bongiovanni provided the necessary survey and legal description; Rex Richie, Bob Kruse and others laid the new foundation; Roland Sizemore gave the necessary expertise for construction; David Davis brought his expertise to the construction team; members of the Depot Town Antique Engine Club provided the man/womanpower; and just about everybody in town commented on how it didn't look like the Tower that they remembered from The Old Days.

As the November *Rag* goes to press, a picture of the frame of the new Tower has already appeared in the *Ypsilanti Press* with the *Ann Arbor News* preparing follow-up coverage. Engine Clubbers and others plan to finish the siding and complex roof design as we head into the final stages of the autumn season. Out-of-towners are already stopping to ask just what that gorgeous, little structure is all about, and Ypsilanti once again is deserving of *two* exclamation points. In fact, if you stand in the middle of the Cross and River intersection, you can easily see both of the famous landmarks, simultaneously.

Edifice name conflict continues

"Not a shanty, but a crossing guard's tower!" says rail historian



Dear Editor:

We want to applaud the current community project to reconstruct a historic and atmospheric landmark down at the depot, and will be the first to defend an editor's privilege to use the American language as he sees fit. However, we are more than a little distressed at the demotion of the graceful and inspiring crossing guard's tower to the status of shanty.

It is true that we should not refer to this structure as a signal tower or switch tower, as this implies control of train movements through signalling or track switch alignment, and we have it on historical authority that the structure was the control center for the crossing gates at the complex intersection of the Michigan Central with Cross and River streets. We also know that the building was a two-story design with control of the gates through a system of mechanical linkages worthy of inclusion in the Edifice Complex sidebars. Ergo, the thing is a tower. A crossing guard's shanty is by contrast a one-story affair provided so the crossing guard can get in out of the weather between trains. A crossing guard working from a shanty would leave the shanty at the approach of a train to either lower the gates or just stand in the road with a stop sign.

We refer in this to both Webster and the publication BUILDINGS & STRUCTURES OF AMERICAN RAILROADS, A Reference Book for Railroad Managers, Superintendents, Master Mechanics, Engineers, Architects, and Students, by Walter G. Berg, 1893. We are happy to be able to clear up this point.

-Sincerely, Mike Flemming

[Tower, shanty, signal house, switching shed, and other appellations have been suggested since the neighborhood first determined to replicate the 'thing' at this location. One reader even told us the design was wrong because it's not the one she remembered as a child. (She couldn't have been that old.) By this month's publication, everyone should be able to see the physical manifestation of that structure and have an opinion of their own as to what to call it. -ed.]

Steam whistle echoes still heard in the district

The steam whistle was essential to steam trains in the local yard or up and down the line. Today's diesel trains give a pale imitation, but listen for some of the same signals while passing time in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town:

- **Two long blasts** = Signal to brakeman to release the brakes. With air brakes, today's two blasts indicate the train is ready to leave the station.
- **One long blast** = approaching a station or crossing.
- **One short toot** = STOP - APPLY BRAKES.
- **Three short toots** = getting ready to back up.
- **Long and a short** = WARNING!, usually an emergency of some sort.
- **A series of short toots** = DANGER,- GET OFF THE TRACKS! That's the signal everyone hears down here during the August Heritage Festival when tourists park their cars with the front wheels against the railroad tracks.

New policy, old theme

"It's Christmas time
The lights are here
Your small donation
Will bring us cheer."

It may sound like 'Burma Shave,' but his year's Festival of Lights can use our help at the gate in volunteer time *and* cash!

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A Depot Town SAMPLER

We're in the book

Editor:

Enclosed please find a single paragraph excerpt from my nearly completed novel, tentatively entitled *Timeless Solitude*. I have enjoyed reading your fine magazine and hope you find this piece worthy of publication. Much of the novel is loosely based in Depot Town, and this is the opening description which, as you can see, is semi-fictional.

I am currently a senior at Eastern Michigan University and have resided in Depot Town for the past six months. I have had several short story and poem publications, including those in *Cellar Roots* and *Onionhead*.

But the town grows older and changes come and go like each passing train. People move away, die. Big business smiles only to reveal its town-crunching teeth. I just want your readers to know that the spirt of Depot Town lives on!

-Steve Lange

Ypsilanti is a Michigan city in limbo. Situated between the stereotyped images of brick streets and sweater vests of U of M's Tab drinking population and the deserted streets and bullet-proof vests of Detroit's coke snorters, it is an epicenter of this conflict of lifestyles. Depot Town is a section in the direct center of Ypsilanti which internally copes with this conflict by relying on past history. Depot Town is seemingly lost in time. Mid 1800 Italianate style brick buildings line both sides of Cross Street and the section is bordered on west and east by the covered bridge over the Huron River and the trainsmoke stained brick Depot trestle, respectively. The covered bridge and the three sets of tracks running past the trestle and crossing Main St. nearly perpendicular are each a sort of Janus, although it is sometimes entirely uncertain as to the direction of the gaze.

[Thanks for the excerpt, Steve. Yes, we can recognize ourselves amongst the fiction. There are lots of stories down here. One could even be told about how we received your letter: An early October thunderstorm must have washed some of the mail out of the boxes on the block, because a soggy lot of it was found in the gutter in front of Aubree's Saloon that day. Neighbors picked it up, dried it, and sorted it out. Two sheets and two envelopes looked like they came from the same wordprocessor and they were placed, stampless, in the editor's hands. How's that for "seemingly lost in time?" -ed]

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